

HOW TO

Get a Second Opinion



Even though their training can be similar, doctors have their own opinions, experiences, and thoughts on how to practice, including diagnosing and treating conditions or diseases. Some doctors opt to take a more conservative, or traditional, approach, while other doctors are more aggressive and tend to use the newest tests and therapies. Because health care (including mental health) is a highly specialized and constantly changing field, it can be difficult for every doctor to be skilled in the latest technology. Getting a second opinion from a different doctor might give you a fresh perspective and more information on how to treat your condition. You can weigh your options and make a more

informed choice about what to do. If you are given similar opinions from two doctors, you also can talk with a third doctor. Here are some tips for how to get a second opinion.

- **Ask your doctor to recommend another doctor or specialist for another opinion.** Don't worry about hurting your doctor's feelings. Most doctors welcome a second opinion, especially when surgery or long-term treatment is involved.
- **If you don't feel comfortable asking your doctor about whom to go to for a second opinion, contact another doctor you trust.** You can also call university teaching hospitals and medical societies in your area for names of doctors. Some

of this information is available on the Internet.

- **Always check with your health insurance provider first to make sure the cost of a second opinion is covered.** Many health insurance providers do. Ask if there are any special procedures you or your primary care doctor need to follow.
- **Arrange to have your medical records sent to the second opinion doctor before your visit.** This gives the new doctor time to look at your records and can help you to avoid repeating medical tests. You need to give written permission to your current doctor to forward any records or test results. You can also request a copy of your medical record for your own files.
- **Learn as much as you can about your condition.** Ask your



doctor for information you can read, go to a local library, or do a search on the Internet. Some teaching hospitals and universities have medical libraries that are open to the public. But be aware that sorting through information that is complicated and sometimes contradictory can be a daunting task. List your questions and concerns and bring the list to discuss with the doctor you are seeing for a second opinion.

- **Never rely solely on the telephone or Internet for a second opinion.** When you get a second opinion, you need to be seen by a doctor. A sound second opinion includes a physical examination and a thorough review of your medical records. Don't forget to ask the doctor to send a written report to your primary doctor and get a copy for your records.